Abstract

It has been well-known that we cannot teach what we do not know. In depth knowledge of the teacher students’ environments is a prerequisite for successful teacher training experiences. Similar to Bonsai Trees, teacher trainees are planted within a confined space. The word “Bonsai” is a Japanese word meaning “planted in a container. Bonsai philosophy sheds light on nourishing and observation of the controlled environments, when a harmonious attitude is inculcated. Hence, the traditional teacher training programs focus primarily on developing prospective teachers’ pedagogical knowledge in ideal environments.

The study attempts to answer the question how classroom management can be improved by observations of teacher trainees’ teaching environments. The results suggest that the observations of controlled environments are complimentary processes that can enhance teacher education programs and enable us to better prepare inexperienced teachers for the challenges related to classroom management. The main purpose of the research was to obtain a coherent representation of the characteristics of the workplace learning environments for CELT-P and CELT-S course takers in public and private schools of Turkey, Istanbul. The second purpose was to gain insight as to the effective feedback providing, which brings improvement and balance to teaching put into context.

The literature study was conducted to determine a current knowledge concerning Bonsai philosophy and how it correlates with teacher training. Additionally, through empirical exploration, such as case study, an outline of characteristics of successful feedback providing and classroom management training was obtained. CELT-P and CELT-S course trainees were given the feedback after each lesson observation, with the three consequential lesson observations in total. The results show that all of them have improved their classroom management skills. The outcomes of literature study and qualitative data collected were combined.

Keywords: bonsai philosophy; teacher training; providing feedback; classroom management; observations.
1. Introduction

When I stepped into teacher training, it reminded me of my old passion for maintaining Bonsai trees. The trees, you are privileged to get hold of, differ from each other in size and characteristics. Teacher trainees on CELT-S and CELT-P Courses resembled Bonsai Trees: they all come from different backgrounds, teach in different contexts, and similar to Bonsai trees, require different care. To be successful at bonsai cultivation, one should acquire knowledge, determination, and most importantly kindness. Exactly the same principles apply in teacher training. Bonsai trees teach cultivators humility and patience; and any sustainable teacher training philosophy includes these features. In the process of trying to sculpt a living, breathing, changing organism, the cultivator submits to the idea that his work will never be finished and complete. Dealing with teachers, who have their own teaching believes and strongholds, as teacher trainers, we should bear in mind that the processes of observation and feedback providing is a culture that is being normalized. Teacher training is a philosophy by itself and requires particular mindset: making ‘young plants’ appear old and aged. All of the teachers are placed in the containers of their own teaching context, and like Bonsai trees, are in need of growth within their own contexts.

I have been teaching and teacher training in Turkey. It is a wonderful country with lots of sunshine and lovely weather. Its Mediterranean climate is perfectly suitable for olive trees, and coincidentally, I would compare teachers in Turkey to olive trees. Similar to Bonsai olive trees, Turkish teachers need lots of sunshine during feedback and should be watered thoroughly whenever the soil gets dry, but constant wetness is to be avoided. In Turkish educational circles, it is common to address each other as ‘hoca’, which means ‘teacher’. It is considered to be the sign of respect. These things should be taken into account when cultivating every tree. Teaching and learning environments are controlled and we should nourish them. Here is the poem that I wrote as an illustration to Bonsai philosophy in teacher training. If the ‘snapped’ lesson is what we analyze, let us turn our observation and feedback into a culture that helps our trainees to flourish.

Bonsai Olive Tree

Incomprehensible to the naked eye
My mini friend - Olive Tree Bonsai!

Well-balanced and well-groomed
By summer will have bloomed!

A downgraded elegance of yours
Can have a greater impact on this earth!

A sense of moment cherished in your midst
Will bring more joy than any giant trees!

A white dove came with the olive twig
I planted in the pot what it brought in its beak.

P.S. And every single glance, just looking at your leaves
I stop to seize the day and get my inner peace.
1.1 Background

Put simply, bonsai is the art of manipulating the growth and appearance of small, young trees to make them look like older, larger ones. In order to give their bonsais a more aged appearance, cultivators carefully prune foliage to bring out the shape of the trunk hidden underneath. Unnecessary or uninteresting branches are amputated, preferably with tools like a concave cutter, so as to minimize scarring. Aside from having a deceptively mature appearance, a good bonsai should reveal no traces of human intervention; scar tissue must appear natural instead of man-made. Symmetry is to be avoided at any and all costs when cultivating a bonsai tree. Perfectly straight trunks have to be bent or countered with foliage cascading in another direction. The most striking bonsais have always been asymmetrical in their design, yet the arrangement of the branches still manages to impart an undeniable sense of harmony. (Brinkhof, 2021)

Trees are not inanimate, but living, breathing organisms. They are like teachers always in flux. They develop leaves in some seasons and shed them in others. Their branches and roots keep on twisting and turning, constantly undoing the work of its cultivator. A trainer is someone who can influence controlled environment of the classroom through observation and feedback. The trainer must have his/her well-established teacher training philosophy to weave one’s pedagogical knowledge into trainees’ classroom without leaving a trace of intervention. A teacher trainer must be aware of education philosophy of the school where its trainee is teaching, and its trainee’s teaching philosophy as well.

1.2 Objectives

This research was a case study with an aim to raise teachers’ teaching quality by providing feedback within CELT-P and CELT-S courses, so it covered lesson evaluation comments, such as planning, learning atmosphere, resources, language and skills, classroom management, checking learning and giving feedback. The main focus was on classroom management and how it can be improved by observation of teacher trainees learning environments.

1.3 Research Questions

This research raises question how classroom management can be improved by observations of teacher trainees’ teaching environments. The main purpose of the research was to obtain a coherent representation of the characteristics of the workplace learning environments for CELT-P and CELT-S course takers in public and private schools of Turkey, Istanbul. The second purpose was to gain insight as to the effective feedback providing, which brings improvement and balance to teaching put into context.
1.4 Research Methods

In this research, quantitative data were collected from target groups in public and private schools in Turkey, Istanbul. Data collection methods were: interviews, classroom observation, teachers’ self-assessment. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and content analysis.

2. “Planted in the Container”: Bonsai philosophy applied to teacher training

2.1 Effective classroom management

Formative and summative assessment feedback on CELT-P and CELT-S courses cover lesson evaluation points, such as planning, learning atmosphere, resources, language and skills, classroom management and checking learning and giving feedback. Teacher trainees’ performance was assessed against criteria presented in Table 2. A series of interviews were conducted to analyze and describe the case series. The extracts from the interviews are shown in Extract1. As evident in Table 2 and Extract 1, a teacher called Ahmet, struggled with classroom management due to a large number of students. Shafika, who works in the same school; predictably, was facing the same problem. Ebru and Merve both found it difficult to teach highly competent learners and mentioned classroom management as one of the main issues that needs to be addressed. A teacher named Rahi, experienced some difficulties with organizing young learner students and giving instructions, since she does not speak her students mother tongue. Managing the students and being able to overcome the barriers stated above — was what the teachers required help with. During teaching observations, I started noticing that all of the teachers resemble bonsai trees that are planted in the conditions of their own classrooms, and need individual approach in finding solutions to their problems. That was the day when I realized that teacher training has been too general, while the trees in pots needed to grow old and aged keeping their sophisticated miniature nature.

Classroom management can be represented by the pot in bonsai. The pots are reckoned to be integral in bonsai culture. They impact the aesthetic and health of the plant. Classroom management and learning atmosphere are the main factors influencing the delivery of material, and as a result, the learning process as a whole. Poor classroom management can lead to stagnation of students’ social-emotional development. If the classroom lacks on good classroom management, the students are not focused on learning, which is their primary goal for going to school. Thus, managing the classroom shifts from the aims of secondary importance to the main focus, and is placed at the heart of lesson assessment criteria. Similar to bonsai that cannot exist without the pot, a successful lesson is not achievable without well managed classroom.

The previous research findings show that several factors and conditions influence classroom management: the self-understanding of teachers and their mindfulness, the multicultural classroom, behavior management, lack of knowledge on classroom management, knowledge

1 Table 2
2 Extract1
of physical and social context, rules, relations and commitment, person-centered versus teacher-centered classroom management, an ecological perspective on classroom management and classroom management in connection with motivation and learning. (Postholm, 2013) My research findings confirm that classroom management is just as much about managing learning processes when an activity is taking place as it is about teachers themselves and their mindfulness and, of course, the atmosphere that they maintain in the classroom. Effective classroom management is born right at the moment when teachers and teacher trainers realize that the teachers can grow only when they are improving in their own contexts.

2.2 Observation and feedback providing

Among all instructional development efforts, the most promising way of fundamentally changing teaching is to observe the teachers and provide the teachers with individualized formative feedback. The most reliable way of valid evaluation is to provide summative assessment feedback to the teachers. In this process, information pertaining to the teacher’s teaching is collected, summarized, and fed back to him/her. Despite the fact that this method has been found extremely effective, it has not been unfailingly successful. The reason for this might be lack of ability to provide feedback constructively. Most studies focus on the kind of information that is fed back to the teacher rather than the process by which the teacher receives the information. Bonsai philosophy applied to teacher training can bring some improvements to conventional observation methods. Bonsai philosophy logic of feedback providing is presented in Model 1. Key principles of Bonsai tree care correlated with teacher training can represent different feedback giving stages and techniques, and a post feedback phase of teacher development. Bonsai trees are normal plants, propagated like any other, but trained using sophisticated techniques to make and keep them miniaturized. (Stemberger, 2014) Teachers require feedback that will help them to grow in their own classrooms and contexts. Bonsai philosophy tree care techniques applied to teacher training help to enhance the teacher’ performance in a particular setting. The styling of Bonsai trees includes basic techniques like regular pruning and wiring, watering, fertilizing and positioning. Each of them corresponds to feedback providing technique. 3 Pruning is crucial for maintaining the shape of the tree in order to make it fit into the container. The output of unnecessary, wrong or irrelevant parts of the lesson can be viewed as pruning in teacher training. Bonsai dwarf requires cutting, so that it does not get too big and its existing shape is preserved. Similarly, a teacher should be brought into a desired shape of his/her context and maintain this shape in the long term. Wiring is an important technique to shape a dwarf. Teaching methodology can be compared to wiring; like the wired parts bent in the desired direction, teaching methods suitable in the context shape a teacher and his/her teaching philosophy. Once the required methods are being actively used,

3 Model1
4 Table1
5 Table1
the wire can be removed and the tree will still keep its shape. Watering\(^6\) is considered to be one of the most important parts of the tree growing process. It is important to never let your teacher dry out of praise. Good points of the lesson should be commented on in order to encourage a teacher to keep the good work. Needless to say, avoid keeping your tree constantly wet. Over-watering might result in bonsai’s trunk becoming loose in the pot and his/her classroom teaching might not improve to the desired extent; healthy critics is the key to success. Fertilizing\(^7\) has been neglected since it requires to go extra mile. Only older more mature trees are often fertilized less frequently. Nourishing teachers with extra resources for shortcuts and ideas is the vital part of feedback that should not be underestimated. Preparation is proved to be a better way, and it is well known that the last-minute solutions rarely bring the desirable outcomes. Positioning\(^8\) a bonsai tree can be compared to the post feedback stage. At this stage a teacher is given instructions concerning his/her future development and improvement. Lots of light is important for the well-being of the tree, if placed in the darker place, bonsai’s growth might slow down. Teacher’s growth is highly dependent on prospects of future development that trainer illuminates during the feedback session.

Determination of quality of education should be based on academic performance of teachers, the number of students and curricula. After graduation, teachers’ skills must also be developed to raise their standards, so they can educate learners up to the educational standard. (Corad, Blackburn, 1985) Here is the right moment to weave Bonsai philosophy as a principle of cultivating. Recent studies revealed that to develop teachers, there should be many different development strategies involved; mentoring, further education and teacher development by concerned parties are among the most efficient ones. In my research, I would like to focus more on an inside strategy of teacher development. Teacher development within the teacher’s own controlled environment, is a good subject to write research on. Evidently, teachers’ controlled environments development methods must be improved. One of the reasons why teacher development has not been very successful was a lack of follow-up and support. Professional development of teachers based on feedback is viewed as a main factor of educational development. Feedback is an important and powerful tool in designing teaching. (Cohen, 1985) It is viewed as an outlined idea of information necessary for understanding and performance of other people such as teachers, executives, friends, books, parents, oneself or experiences. (Hattie, 2007)

To sum up, feedback is a powerful tool providing teacher trainees and practitioners with clear ideas and making room for reflection. Nevertheless, effective feedback depends on various factors and primarily on feedback giving techniques and philosophy. Bonsai philosophy applied to teacher training draws parallels between growing trees in the pots and efficient feedback giving techniques that have proved to improve teachers’ performance.

\(^6\) Table1
\(^7\) Table1
\(^8\) Table1
3. Case Series

3.1 Ahmet and Shafika
Ahmet and Shafika are both working in the public school in Turkey, Istanbul. The school is free of charge and due to the fact that the majority of the families in this area cannot afford private tuition, the school is completely packed. The lessons have to be in two shifts with extremely large classes, which are not suitable for language learning. Ahmet has been teaching for 3 years and Shafika for 5 years.
Disadvantages: both of the teachers faced problems managing large classes.
Advantages: both of the teachers are Turkish and speak the students’ L1.

3.2 Rahi
Rahi is an Iranian teacher who relocated to Turkey for work. She works for the private school with quite high tuition fees.
Advantages: The school is well equipped with the latest learning technology and has plenty of resources and materials to support a teacher.
Disadvantages: Rahi does not come from Turkey and her L1 is Farsi, she might find it difficult sometimes to explain herself to young learners.

3.3 Ebru and Merve
Ebru and Merve are both working in the private highly prestigious school in Istanbul with the students having access to summer English schools in English speaking countries all over the globe.
Advantages: the students are very good at English and do not require a lot of retrieval practice.
Disadvantages: The students might be a bit arrogant sometimes, and feel that they speak English better than the teachers. Ebru and Merve are both stressed with teaching highly competent learners.

4. Research Results
4.1 Analysis Results of Teachers’ improvement

Teachers’ problems were analyzed based on lesson evaluation check-list for both formative and summative assessment types. There were three observations in total: with two formative assessments and reflective interviews with the teachers held right after the observations. The last observation was summative assessment and the teachers were granted marks, such as merit, satisfactory or in need of improvement. All teachers assessed their performance as satisfactory, while two of them even got merit. Details of each element of assessment were consistent, such as planning, learning atmosphere, resources, language and skills, classroom management and checking learning and giving feedback.
Things that needed improvement were noted and the trainer’s feedback was delivered to the teachers. In addition, teachers’ reflective interviews were conducted and their controlled environments were analyzed.
When I examined teachers’ contexts, I found that teachers focused on their contexts problems more than on their lesson plans, spelling, etc. Controlled environments kind of feedback helped to improve teaching and raise learning quality. Observations of five teachers teaching English as
A second language in primary and secondary schools showed that the five teachers taught according to their teaching curriculum and used diverse teaching materials to give their students a better understanding of the subject. Although, the teachers struggled with their own controlled environment problems that needed the trainer’s attention and assistance. Details of analysis results of teachers’ controlled environments improvement are in Table 1.

Table 1. Analysis results of teachers’ environments improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Reflective Interview</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
<th>Classroom management improvements (Summative Feedback)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahmet</td>
<td>Public (Secondary)</td>
<td>Classroom management problems due to the large number of students.</td>
<td>Ahmet feels drained by the number of students. He confessed that he has to raise his voice sometimes in order to make them pay attention.</td>
<td><strong>Watering</strong>&lt;br&gt;When you organized a group work and paired weak Ss with the strong ones according to differentiation principles. (good point!) You are teaching large classes and it is sometimes difficult to manage the Ss due to their amount.&lt;br&gt;<strong>Pruning</strong>&lt;br&gt;Do not raise your voice at students. It shows your inability to have things under control.&lt;br&gt;<strong>Wiring</strong>&lt;br&gt;Make clear rules and stick to them. Post them for everyone to see, and abide by them.&lt;br&gt;<strong>Fertilizing</strong>&lt;br&gt;Teaching Large Classes, Jason Anderson</td>
<td>Ahmet incorporated instructional activities such as problem solving tasks, role-play, and demonstrations to help engage students and encourage participation. He actively used technology to his advantage. Online tools and videos encourage engagement, spark discussion and leverage what students are learning and retaining. He actively used the chants (songs) which are classroom conduct rules! “I can follow the rules” (it is a classic). He learned this song by heart with his Ss, and play it out every time they misbehaved. He made them stand up, listen to it and repeat!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shafika</td>
<td>Public (Secondary)</td>
<td>Classroom management problems due to the large amount of students.</td>
<td>Shafika confessed that she stopped paying attention to each and every student in the class due to the high number of them. Only the most active students participate, the rest are just passive listeners.</td>
<td><strong>Watering</strong>&lt;br&gt;I really liked that you had a lot of “emergency” activities and assignments ready when you finished what you were supposed to do earlier. It engaged more students than some planned activities.&lt;br&gt;<strong>Pruning</strong>&lt;br&gt;Do not just stand by the whiteboard at the front. Move around the class, even while lecturing, so all students feel that you are there for them.&lt;br&gt;<strong>Wiring</strong>&lt;br&gt;Divide the students into team, it can promote collaboration.&lt;br&gt;<strong>Fertilizing</strong>&lt;br&gt;Teaching Large Classes, Jason Anderson.&lt;br&gt;<strong>Positioning</strong>&lt;br&gt;Look for some ideas on how to keep the students’ attention!</td>
<td>Shafika added more technology to her classes. Kahoot game to test what she teaches at the end of every class. Instead of using herself as an example, she tried to use some of the students and it engaged them more since they started feeling themselves more valuable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ebru</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>The students might be a bit arrogant sometimes and feel that they speak English better than the teachers. Ebru and Merve are both stressed with teaching highly competent learners. Ebru stated that her inability to answer all the questions of her students affected her self-esteem in a bad way. Watering - Using extensive reading in new classes is a good way to enrich your students’ vocabulary. (Well done!) Pruning - Do not get the students to the stage when they treat you like a dictionary! Make them use the dictionary to look up the words they do not know. Wiring - Ask the students to always have a mini dictionary with them for your class. It might be an e-dictionary if they use tablets instead of physical books. Fertilizing - An Instinct for Truth: Curiosity and the Moral Character of Science, Robert T. Pennock. Positioning - Always keep the students busy with interesting tasks. Use one level up method to engage them and make the lessons challenging. Ebru made a dictionary a must-have part of her classes. The students were competing who would find the word first. She paired weaker students with stronger ones to help both of the students benefit from the collaboration.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merve</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>The students might be a bit arrogant sometimes and feel that they speak English better than the teachers. Ebru and Merve are both stressed with teaching highly competent learners. Merve mispronounced the TL word and one of the students corrected her. She got a bit aggressive in return. She checked the word during the break and realized that the student was right. Watering - Choral Drills were a good idea to develop more accurate pronunciation. Pruning - Make sure that you check the pronunciation of the target vocabulary beforehand. Nothing can be worse than fossilized errors of the students. Wiring - Respect should be the rule of your classroom. Model for your students how you expect them to speak to yourself. A role play on how to respond to people who disagree with their opinion can be a solution. If you make a mistake it should be OK for the teacher’s ego to turn that into a teachable moment. Correct yourself in front of the class, we are all human and errors are the part of the human nature. Fertilizing - The Girl Who Never Made Mistakes, Mark Pett. Positioning - Look for some authentic materials and gamification to get away from a traditional way of teaching. It will make the atmosphere in your classroom more relaxed. Merve created a wonderful vocabulary lesson with real objects, which aided her students in remembering the new words. She used songs to practice pronunciation and felt more relaxed that the students would get the right pronunciation from the songs.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rahi</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Does not know the students’ L 1. Rahi has trouble expressing herself and giving instructions to young learners since she does not speak her students’ L 1. Watering - I really liked the way you explained the purpose of the task to your students using CCQs to gain more accurate evaluation of your students’ understanding. Pruning - Primary learners do not have a good sense of language due to their age. Even if you do it all right, the principle applied to adults do not work with young learners. Wiring - Rahi used TPR or mimed things she could not express verbally, it worked very well with her learners. She even brought some puppets to help herself communicate with the learners.</td>
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</table>
Use an appropriate tone, try to change the mode of your voice. Use gestures and body language.

| Fertilizing | Learning Another Language Through Actions, James J. Asher |

Positioning
Not knowing your students’ L1 does not mean you cannot give instructions. Look for some other ways of instruction giving suitable for different types of learners!

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Model 1. Bonsai Philosophy logic model of trainer’s feedback

**Pruning**
Lesson Output
What should be removed?

**Wiring**
Methodology enhancement
How to improve it?

**Watering**
Lesson Input
What worked well?

**Fertilizing**
Teaching resources improvement
What should I read?

**Positioning**
Reinforcement
What should I do next?
Extract 1. Interview

Interviewer: Among all the stages of your lesson evaluation flow (planning, learning atmosphere, resources, language and skills, classroom management, checking and giving feedback) which were the hardest to deal with? Teacher Ahmet: I would say learning atmosphere and classroom management. My class consists of 45 students. The majority of my students are boys who sit next to each other and tend to distract each other.

Teacher Rahi: To me learning atmosphere and classroom management. I do not speak Turkish and I fail to give instructions to my students sometimes.
Only some of them might understand me and since they are low graders they do not guess to pass my instructions to those who did not get it.

Teacher Ebru: Definitely learning atmosphere and classroom management. I feel stressed when a student asks me what is the word in English, and I do not know the word. It impacts my self-esteem as a teacher and I feel discouraged.

4. Conclusion

In this research, a case series analysis was performed to raise teachers’ teaching quality of CELT-P and CELT-S course takers in schools of Turkey, Istanbul. I analyzed target teachers’ problems. Analysis of teachers’ controlled environments problems showed that they put a lot of efforts into their teaching and were responsible in their jobs as teachers. However, they could not address their controlled environments problems themselves. They received training on CELT-P and CELT-S courses and were observed in order to improve their teaching in their own classrooms. The purpose of this article was to outline the essential elements of an in-service system approach to build fluency with effective classroom management and teacher’s environment improvement. I included recommendations on locating evidence-based classroom management practices, outlined the research related to effective professional development, and explored how Bonsai philosophy implementation into teacher training has influenced understanding of effective professional development. I provided both a research study and an implementation case series example illustrating how the recommended structures might be applied in a typical school setting.

References


